



Bhumij Folksongs- From Recreation to Perception

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Abstract— Human communities transmit knowledge through two major channels: written traditions and oral traditions. Many tribal communities have historically relied more on oral transmission than on written documentation, and their collective memory is preserved through myths, legends, proverbs, riddles, ritual utterances, ballads, and folksongs. This paper studies selected Bhumij folksongs from Mayurbhanj district of Odisha as a form of oral literature. It focuses particularly on nature-oriented, devotional, and work-related songs because these categories most clearly reveal Bhumij consciousness about ecology, labour, community, worship, and everyday survival. The paper does not attempt to cover the entire range of Bhumij song traditions, such as marriage songs, love songs, or festival songs, because such a broad scope would require separate fieldwork and a different corpus. Drawing on primary field collection, translation, and close textual analysis, the study argues that Bhumij folksongs move beyond recreation: they preserve memory, communicate values, express ecological ethics, and make visible the community's perception of the world. The title "from recreation to perception" therefore indicates a movement from songs as entertainment to songs as cultural texts through which social consciousness can be read.



Keywords— Bhumij, folksongs, oral literature, tribal culture, Mayurbhanj, ecology, consciousness

I. INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

Oral literature is one of the oldest and most enduring forms of cultural expression. Before the widespread use of writing, communities preserved their histories, beliefs, memories, and social values through spoken and performed forms. In tribal societies, oral literature often remains an active medium of knowledge transmission because songs, tales, myths, riddles, and proverbs are remembered, repeated, and re-created in everyday life. Nityanand Pattnaik observes that the unwritten literary world of tribal communities constitutes an important body of folklore because it carries memory from one generation to another (Pattnaik). In this sense, oral literature is not merely a storehouse of the past; it is also a living practice through which a community explains its relation with nature, labour, ancestors, deities, and society.

Folksongs occupy a special place within oral literature. They are sung during work, ritual, leisure, festivals, agricultural seasons, and moments of collective emotion. A folksong may appear simple in diction and melody, but it often carries a complex cultural meaning. It may entertain

the community and at the same time teach moral conduct, define social relationships, express devotion, record suffering, celebrate nature, or articulate protest. The study of folksongs therefore requires attention not only to the song-text but also to its performance context, singers, audience, occasion, and cultural function. As studies of tribal songs and oral epics in India suggest, songs may be read from literary, anthropological, and social perspectives together because they are artistic forms as well as cultural documents (Ram and Ram).

The present article studies selected Bhumij folksongs from the Mayurbhanj district of Odisha. The Bhumij are an important tribal community of eastern India, with a significant presence in Odisha, Jharkhand, and West Bengal. In Odisha, they are found mainly in Mayurbhanj, Balasore, Sundargarh, and Keonjhar. The community's name is commonly understood as "born from the soil," a meaning that connects the people with land, agriculture, and locality. This association with land is not merely etymological; it is reflected in Bhumij oral culture, where

forests, trees, cultivation, kinship, labour, and devotion recur as major motifs.

The scope of this paper is deliberately limited. Folk songs can be classified on the basis of theme and occasion, such as love songs, heroic songs, marriage songs, religious songs, work songs, seasonal songs, songs of social morality, songs of entertainment, and songs that describe the relation between human beings and nature. This article focuses on nature-oriented, devotional, and work-related Bhumij songs. These categories have been selected because they are directly connected with the paper's central aim: to understand how Bhumij folksongs express tribal consciousness about nature, labour, survival, worship, and community identity. Other categories, such as love songs, children's songs, marriage songs, and heroic narratives, are not denied importance; they are excluded only because they require a larger corpus and a separate analytical frame. The selected songs are therefore used as representative examples rather than as the totality of Bhumij song tradition.

The title "Bhumij Folksongs: From Recreation to Perception" needs clarification. In ordinary social life, folksongs are often understood as songs of recreation because they are sung for pleasure, rhythm, and collective participation. However, when they are studied as oral literature, they reveal perception: the community's view of nature, labour, social relations, and sacred power. The word "perception" here refers to cultural consciousness, not individual opinion. The paper argues that Bhumij songs are not only recreational performances but also interpretive texts that show how the community understands its world.

Objectives

The paper aims to:

- document selected Bhumij folksongs from Mayurbhanj as examples of oral literature;
- identify the thematic categories represented in the selected corpus, especially nature-oriented, devotional, and work-related songs;
- examine how these songs express Bhumij consciousness about ecology, labour, community, and spiritual life;
- translate selected songs into English while retaining their cultural meaning as far as possible; and
- locate the study within existing scholarship on folklore, tribal oral literature, and Bhumij/Munda cultural contexts.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study follows a qualitative and descriptive methodology. The primary material consists of selected Bhumij/Mundari folksongs collected from Bhumij

community contexts in Mayurbhanj district, particularly the Udala region and neighbouring areas where Bhumij cultural practices remain active. The data were gathered through field visits, informal interviews with singers and community members, group discussions, and observation of the social contexts in which songs are remembered and performed. The field method is important because oral literature cannot be adequately understood as isolated written text; its meaning is shaped by performance, occasion, and community memory.

Secondary sources are used to provide a scholarly framework. Works on tribal oral literature, Odisha folklore, Indian folk culture, and Munda/Bhumij cultural contexts help situate the selected songs within wider debates on folklore and oral tradition. The review of literature is not presented as a list of books but as a discussion of how previous scholarship helps identify the gap in the present study.

The translation method is also significant. The songs were first recorded or written in the source language as remembered by the singers. They were then translated into English through a meaning-based method rather than a strictly word-for-word method. The purpose of the translation is to communicate the central image, feeling, and cultural meaning of the songs to readers who do not know the source language. Wherever literal translation would produce confusion, a culturally equivalent English expression has been preferred. At the same time, key cultural terms such as "Karam," "Bonga," and "Dharam Daru" have been retained or explained because they carry meanings that cannot be fully replaced by English words. The translations should therefore be read as interpretive translations, not as final or fixed versions of the songs.

Profile of Bhumij Community

The Bhumij are one of the prominent tribal communities of eastern India. Their settlement history is associated with the forested and agrarian regions of Chota Nagpur and adjoining areas of Odisha, Jharkhand, and West Bengal. Colonial ethnographic accounts such as those of H. H. Risley associated the Bhumij with the larger Munda group and noted regional variations in language and culture (Risley). Although such colonial writings must be used critically because they often classify communities from an external administrative viewpoint, they remain useful for understanding how the Bhumij were historically described in relation to land, language, and social change.

In Odisha, the Bhumij are concentrated mainly in Mayurbhanj and adjoining districts. Mayurbhanj has long been a significant region of tribal settlement, where communities such as the Santal, Ho, Bathudi, Munda, and Bhumij have interacted with forests, agriculture, markets,

and regional political histories. The district was formerly a princely state and later merged with Odisha. Its cultural landscape is shaped by forests, hills, seasonal agriculture, and multilingual exchange. These conditions have influenced Bhumij oral traditions, where references to soil, trees, tools, fields, deities, parents, and village community appear frequently.

The Bhumij are closely associated with the Munda linguistic and cultural world, though many have also adopted regional languages such as Odia, Bengali, or Hindi depending on location and historical contact. The Bhumij oral tradition includes songs, tales, ritual utterances, and memories of work and worship. Some sections of the community have shown interest in scripts such as Ol Onal and Mundari Bani, but the oral mode continues to be central to cultural transmission. This makes documentation urgent, not because oral traditions are inferior to writing, but because modern education, migration, language shift, and social change may reduce the occasions on which younger generations learn these songs directly from elders.

The community is internally diverse. Local classifications mention groups such as Tamudia or Tamaria Bhumij, Holdipokharia Bhumij, Teli Bhumij, and Dehuri or Desi Bhumij. Such divisions may vary by locality, occupation, ritual role, and social memory. For the present article, these internal distinctions are not the main object of study; they are mentioned to indicate that Bhumij culture is not uniform and must be studied with attention to local variation.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Scholarship on folklore and tribal oral literature provides the background for the present study. Pattnaik's work on the oral literature of the Santali, Kharia, Oraon, and Munda communities of Odisha is especially relevant because it treats the unwritten literary world of tribal communities as a serious cultural archive (Pattnaik). His work demonstrates that myths, legends, songs, and stories should not be considered marginal or primitive forms; rather, they are central to the transmission of community knowledge. This approach supports the present study's treatment of Bhumij folksongs as cultural texts.

Uma Ram and K. S. Ram's study of tribal songs, ballads, and oral epics of Bastar is useful because it shifts attention from purely anthropological description to literary criticism (Ram and Ram). Their work suggests that tribal songs can be analyzed for imagery, structure, voice, emotion, and social meaning. This is important for the present paper because Bhumij songs are not examined only as ethnographic data but also as expressive compositions with poetic and symbolic value.

Studies on Odisha's folk culture, fairs, festivals, and tribal traditions help locate Bhumij songs within a wider regional

context. Manmath Padhy and Achintya Mahapatra discuss folk legends, dances, fairs, and festivals of Odisha, showing how community performance is tied to ritual calendars and social life (Padhy and Mahapatra). Bhagabana Sahu's work on the folklife and culture of Odisha similarly emphasizes the connection between folk expression and everyday practice (Sahu). These studies are valuable for understanding the cultural setting in which Bhumij songs are performed, though they do not focus specifically on Bhumij folksongs as the central object of analysis.

Works on Indian folk literature and tribal culture also provide a broad conceptual foundation. Rani Kapoor treats folk literature as an important source for understanding social history and human concerns (Kapoor). Chitrasen Pasayat's work on Indian tribes in folk culture and Guptajit Pathak's study of folkloristic identity in tribal India underline the role of folklore in shaping identity (Pasayat; Pathak). C. R. Das's work on folk culture and literature in Odisha points to the philosophical and social dimensions of Adivasi songs (Das). These contributions indicate that folk literature is not merely decorative but carries a community's worldview.

Verrier Elwin and later editors of tribal myths and legends of Odisha have shown that myths are a mode through which tribal communities explain origin, creation, morality, and the relation between humans and supernatural forces (Elwin; Tripathy and Basa). Although myths and songs are different genres, both belong to oral tradition and often share symbolic concerns. In Bhumij songs, for example, trees may appear as living presences and divine protectors, which connects song imagery with mythic and ritual consciousness.

The gap in existing scholarship is clear. There are many studies on folk songs in general, tribal oral traditions, and Odisha folklore, but focused literary analysis of Bhumij folksongs remains limited. Existing works often discuss larger tribal groups, wider regions, or general categories of folklore. The present paper addresses this gap by studying selected Bhumij songs from Mayurbhanj and by showing how these songs express ecological, devotional, and labour-related consciousness. The paper therefore contributes to the documentation and interpretation of a relatively understudied oral tradition.

Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective of this paper combines folklore studies, oral literature, and cultural interpretation. Folklore may be understood as the expressive culture of a community transmitted through tradition. It includes not only verbal forms such as songs, tales, proverbs, and riddles, but also performances, rituals, beliefs, and customary practices. Folksongs are therefore not isolated poems; they are part of

a larger cultural system. Their meaning depends on who sings them, when they are sung, why they are sung, and how the community understands them.

Oral literature differs from written literature in its mode of composition and transmission. It is not fixed in a single authoritative text. A song may change slightly from singer to singer, and such variation is not a defect but a feature of oral tradition. The singer is both a transmitter and a re-creator. This makes the study of Bhumij folksongs methodologically sensitive: one must pay attention to repeated images and themes rather than expecting textual fixity.

Folksongs perform several social functions. They provide recreation and emotional release; they educate younger generations; they transmit community memory; they strengthen group identity; they regulate moral behaviour; and they connect human life with sacred and natural forces. In the Bhumij context, songs often reveal a worldview in which human beings, trees, land, tools, ancestors, and deities are interrelated. This worldview may be described as ecological and relational because nature is not treated merely as a resource but as a living presence within community life.

The concept of consciousness is central to this paper. Here, consciousness does not refer to political awareness alone. It refers to the community's collective understanding of its own life-world: its relation to soil, forests, labour, kinship, suffering, worship, and survival. When a Bhumij song gives voice to a tree, praises a deity, or celebrates the dignity of labour, it reveals the community's perception of existence. The theoretical movement of the paper is therefore from performance to meaning: from song as recreation to song as perception.

The Folk Songs

The selected songs belong primarily to three overlapping categories: nature-oriented songs, devotional songs, and work-related songs. These categories are not rigid. A single song may combine ecological awareness, ritual devotion, and social feeling. For example, a tree-song may be at once an environmental appeal, a moral instruction, and a spiritual statement. Similarly, a work song may describe agricultural labour while also expressing community pride.

1. Work, Identity, and Collective Life

The following song identifies the community through labour and land:

*We are the Mundas
We plough the land,
Work with shovels and crowbar,*

*This is our music for work,
Of toil and sweat of the body.
Let this song float afar.
Love of father and mother
Is everything for us.
We have no worry, no griefs,
As the frogs frolic and swim
When tired.*

The song links identity with agricultural work. The speaker does not define the community by wealth, kingship, or written history, but by ploughing, tools, bodily labour, parental love, and collective song. Work is not represented as shame; it becomes "music." The image of frogs swimming when tired connects human labour with natural life. The song thus presents a worldview where human beings belong to the field, the family, and the environment. It also shows why Bhumij folksongs cannot be reduced to entertainment: the song converts labour into dignity and community memory.

2. Daruwa Binti/ Pleading for Life

"Daruwa Binti" is a nature-oriented song in which a tree speaks to human beings and pleads for life. The use of personification is central. By allowing the tree to speak, the song transforms a common act of cutting wood into a moral situation. The tree is not silent matter; it has pain, family, memory, and the desire to serve. This reveals a deeply ecological imagination.

The song is important for two reasons. First, it shows that the Bhumij imagination gives voice to non-human life. The tree has a family and a future, which means that deforestation is presented not only as economic use but also as violence against life. Second, the tree does not reject human need completely. It reminds human beings that it gives fuel, shade, fruit, leaves, and breeze. The ethical demand is therefore not absolute separation from nature but respectful coexistence. The song carries an ecological message long before modern environmental vocabulary enters the discussion.

1. Dharam Daru/ Evergreen Deity

"Dharam Daru" is a devotional song in which the tree is addressed as a sacred protector. The song is connected with the cultural world of Karam worship and the reverence given to trees as living symbols of divine power. Words such as "Bonga" and "Dharam Daru" indicate the presence of sacred force within the natural world. The song therefore belongs to the category of religious or devotional folksong, but it is also ecological because divinity is experienced through the tree.

Daruwa Binti	Pleading for Life
Kaage manmi kaage Aalam maa ginka senaha Ka hayajiyao kai senaha Aape aalah jula te Din din ge penetrate. Talak rapuda kedam Kam other jada hasu jiao Chila ka da tama-kulama Aaurio lel kawa han gana Jaika adah jaikimin Pereyaka musi aukate Nerege dular chimin Jathah amam tanai sana sakam Dalab bawa adha jayaa Kape banchaawa kai ama kere Aapeke hudhiha hayah Janam teya moran hama Tayre tanai aapeya sebare Jid tai jan re sena sebapeya Aalam gajiao dada re	No, human, no! Do not strike me with the axe. Do not throw me Into the fire of the hearth. This is my pain, agony, and misery. I am yet to see My children and grandchildren. How can you not understand How delightful life would be then? I have given all I have: Branches, fruits, leaves, and breeze. How can you make me bleed And plead for life? I yearn to live So that I may serve you again and again. How can you not imagine What it means to be allowed to breathe?

DHARAM DARU	EVERGREEN DEITY
Karam karam karam bonga Jowar joara karam bonga-2 Aam ke seva jamale Suku duku hatinwa jamale Munda kowa amdore dhoram daru Karam karam karam daru Munda kowa amdore dhoram daru Karam karam karam bonga Jowar joara karam bonga-2 Aam ke seva jamales Suku duku hatinwa jamale Munda kowa amdore dhoram daru Karam karam karam daru Munda kowa amdore dhoram daru Dhuna dhupo ta baa malate Amke atang daram jamale Duku boina re sutuh talem Amke issu nehar jamale Nehar nehar karam bonga	Hail to thee my Supreme deity, Hail to thee, Your service is my piety, You are my companion in dark and light. Hail to thee my Supreme deity, Hail to thee, The glory of the Munda clan, Shower your blessings to be a Man. Hail to thee my Evergreen deity, Hail to thee, Humbly offer you incense and flowers, Never deny shade of your divine hands. Hail to thee my Evergreen deity, Hail to thee, In this ocean of sorrows, Spirit and strength from you we borrow. Hail to thee my Evergreen deity,

Atang daram karam bonga Amke binate Jamale Shahas omalem jolon jalare Munda kowa amdore dhoram daru Karam karam karam daru Munda kowa amdore dhoram daru Diya salita hulu huli ta Amke atang daram jamale Maya duniya re soto amge Pellah omalem allake Jayo jayo jayo karam bonga Addi addi dhoram karam bonga Amke biswas tamale Ukku talam taam kole re Munda kowa amdore dhoram daru Karam karam karam daru Munda kowa amdore dhoram daru. Durang durang ta susun susun te Aake rijhaw tanale Dumang saddi te dholl saddi te Amke rasike ichhi tanale Dhoram dhoram dhoram karam bonga Amke khojhar tanale Sipinj doho talem Munda kowa amdore dhoram daru Karam karam karam daru Munda kowa amdore dhoram daru	Hail to thee, Venerating you, holy lamps we burn, Blow the conch shell along pious orison. Hail to thee my Evergreen deity, Hail to thee, Lead us in the path of truth, Never do we alter from your faith. Hail to thee my Evergreen deity, Hail to thee, Let our trust in you be unaltered, Shield us that we never be perturbed. Hail to thee my Evergreen deity, Hail to thee, In dancing, singing and making merry, Our goals never do we bury. Hail to thee my Evergreen deity, Hail to thee, Aligning in pairs and rejoicing, To the tunes of drumbeats dancing. Hail to thee my Evergreen deity, Hail to thee, Prayer before your lotus feet, Constancy in our devotion never adrift.
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The song shows that sacredness is not outside the natural world. The tree is protector, companion, and deity. The worshipper seeks blessings not from an abstract distant power but from a living natural presence. This reveals the relational structure of Bhumij spirituality: the community's well-being depends on maintaining respectful relations with natural forces. The song also shows how worship, ecology, and identity overlap. The "Munda clan" is invoked through the tree, suggesting that community identity is ritually rooted in nature.

Analysis: Folksongs and Bhumij Consciousness

1. Ecological Consciousness

The strongest theme in the selected songs is ecological consciousness. In "Daruwaha Binti," the tree is not merely an object used for fuel; it is a speaking subject. The song asks listeners to imagine the pain of the tree and the future of its children. This form of personification is not simply a literary ornament. It expresses a worldview in which human life and non-human life are morally connected. The song teaches restraint, gratitude, and compassion toward the environment. Such an attitude corresponds with the wider tribal understanding of nature as a living field of relation rather than a dead store of resources (Pattnaik; Pasayat).

The ecological dimension becomes spiritual in "Dharam Daru." The tree is not only useful but sacred. The people

offer incense and flowers and seek protection from the deity-tree. The song therefore challenges the separation between nature and religion. In many tribal contexts, sacred groves, ritual trees, hills, rivers, and ancestral places form part of lived religion. The Bhumij song reflects this pattern by making the tree both ecological and divine.

2. Labour Consciousness

The work song presents labour as identity. "We plough the land" is not a complaint but a collective declaration. The song gives dignity to manual work and agricultural life. Tools such as shovels and crowbars are not simply instruments; they become symbols of community survival. The phrase "music for work" suggests that song transforms toil into rhythm and collective energy. In this respect, Bhumij folksongs function as emotional support during labour and as a cultural affirmation of the worker's life.

The song also reveals an ethics of simplicity. Love of father and mother, bodily labour, and natural images are presented as sufficient sources of meaning. The absence of "worry" and "griefs" should not be read literally as the absence of hardship. Rather, it expresses a cultural ideal: the community survives through labour, kinship, and harmony with nature. This is why folksongs are significant social documents. They show how people interpret hardship through shared performance.

3. Devotional and Ritual Consciousness

Devotional consciousness in the selected songs is inseparable from nature. "Dharam Daru" invokes Karam Bonga and addresses the tree as a sacred companion. The repeated hail or salutation creates the rhythm of prayer. The song does not use elaborate theology; its power lies in repetition, humility, and direct address. The devotee does not debate divine existence but participates in a relationship of service and protection.

This kind of song also educates the community. Through repeated performance, younger listeners learn whom to honour, how to address sacred forces, and why natural beings deserve respect. In oral cultures, such learning often happens through participation rather than formal instruction. The song is therefore both worship and pedagogy.

4. Social and Moral Consciousness

The selected songs communicate moral values without abstract preaching. "Daruwa Binti" teaches compassion by dramatizing the pain of the tree. The work song teaches respect for labour and parents. "Dharam Daru" teaches gratitude and humility before sacred nature. These values are not presented in the form of rules; they are embedded in images, rhythm, and performance. This is one of the

strengths of oral literature: it communicates social morality through memorable and emotionally charged forms.

The songs also reveal the collective rather than individual nature of Bhumij consciousness. The speaker often speaks for a group: "we are," "our music," "our deity," "our clan." Even when the tree speaks in the first person, its plea concerns the relationship between species and generations. The songs therefore move beyond personal emotion and articulate a shared moral universe.

5. From Recreation to Perception

The phrase "from recreation to perception" summarizes the central argument of the article. At the level of performance, Bhumij folksongs provide recreation: people sing during work, ritual, and community gatherings. The songs create pleasure, rhythm, and participation. But at the level of interpretation, they reveal perception: how the community sees land, trees, deities, labour, kinship, and survival. Recreation and perception are not opposites. Recreation is the mode through which perception is transmitted. The songs remain enjoyable because they are sung collectively, but they remain meaningful because they carry the community's worldview.

IV. CONCLUSION

Bhumij folksongs are an important part of the oral literature of Mayurbhanj and of the wider tribal cultural heritage of Odisha. They preserve memory, emotion, and social values through performance. The selected songs analysed in this paper show that Bhumij oral tradition is deeply connected with land, forest, labour, worship, and community identity. A tree may speak, a deity may live through a tree, and work may become music. These images reveal a cultural consciousness in which human beings are not separated from nature but are placed within a network of ecological, spiritual, and social relations.

The study has focused on nature-oriented, devotional, and work-related songs because these categories most clearly reveal the movement from recreation to perception. The article has not attempted to cover the whole range of Bhumij folksongs. Marriage songs, love songs, seasonal songs, children's songs, and heroic songs remain important areas for future research. Further fieldwork should collect more songs from different Bhumij regions, compare versions across villages, document performance contexts, and include the voices of singers, especially elder women and ritual specialists who often preserve oral memory.

The documentation and translation of Bhumij folksongs are valuable not because oral tradition needs to be replaced by writing, but because written records can support cultural continuity in a period of rapid social change. When

translated and analysed carefully, these songs can reach wider academic audiences without losing their rootedness in community life. The present study therefore argues that Bhumij folksongs deserve serious literary and cultural attention. They are songs of recreation, but they are also songs of perception, memory, and consciousness.

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